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ABSTRACT

Because of the historical influence of religion in the national life and personal lives of many American citizens and the interplay between religious and national affairs in public discourse, it is useful to study the secular media for its portrayal of religion as news or as value system. A study describes the nature of commentary on religion by the mass media by examining recent editorial cartoons that refer to religious subjects. One hundred and fifty-one editorial cartoons from 24 newspapers published in the United States over a 13-month period beginning September 1, 1986, were studied for visual content, metaphors, and thematic narratives offered about religion. Findings showed that in the editorial cartoons (1) religion was pictured as a competitive arena with religious groups and leaders battling over "turf" or concentrating on fundraising at the expense of spiritual service; (2) images and narratives portrayed religion as dominated by combative leaders obsessed with self-interest, whose practices are diametrically opposed to the standards of modesty, stewardship, and emphasis on spiritual values that is normally assumed leaders will hold; (3) religious issues are nothing sacred and they have become a part of the fabric of political and economic affairs, not just the culture; and (4) cartoonists were guided by a vision of traditional religious values. (Twelve figures, 3 tables of data, and 5 notes are included, and 10 references are appended.) (MS)

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Keepers of the Flame: Rhetorical Themes in Recent Editorial Cartoons on Religion

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Although the United States was founded on principles separating church and state, religion has historically been influential in national life and in the personal lives of many American citizens. God and Country are frequently linked in public discourse in such a way as to suggest the existence of a national religion, or, at least, a national religious ethic. Religious groups have, at various times, acted collectively to influence political action. In recent years, religious matters have surrounded Presidents and Presidential candidates; several have described themselves as born-again Christians, and Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter regularly invoked the name of God in their policy and ideology statements. Two candidates in the current Presidential campaign have been ministers by profession.[1]

In response to the interplay between religious and national affairs in public discourse, researchers have begun to study this relationship from the perspective of mass communication. Attention has particularly focused on religious organizations' use of mass communication technology in religious persuasion and practice-- the "electronic church." Less attention has been given to the study of the secular media for its portrayal of religion as news or as value system. Roderick Hart, Kathleen Turner, and Ralph Knupp constructed a rhetorical profile of religious reporting by a national news magazine over a period of years, but in doing so they noted that such systematic studies of religious images were rare in scholarly publications (254).

This study follows the example of Hart, et al., in describing the nature of commentary on religion by the mass media by examining recent

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I am grateful to Carolyn Anderson for her helpful comments during this study.

editorial cartoons that refer to religious subjects. Editorial cartoons are one form of "visual language" that has been examined by communication scholars. As a widely influential, if not widely studied, form of mass mediated communication, the editorial cartoon can be said to reflect and shape social reality in ways similar to news reports, television programs, or magazine advertisements. Michael DeSousa and Martin Medhurst note that cartoons are "an important index to the major issues of the day" because they reflect current topics (92). DeSousa describes various functions of the cartoon as agenda-setting, framing, and persuading (205), further making a case for the rhetorical power of cartoons. Matthew Morrison maintains that cartoonists are "effective image molders" who are anything but insignificant (252), a view historically confirmed by the words and actions of those who have been on the receiving end of the cartoonist's jab. Cartoonists have been imprisoned and their work has been supressed, even in recent times, suggesting the presence of rhetorical force. The validity of the cartoonist's efforts as free speech were upheld earlier this year by the United States Supreme Court. Furthermore, as Janette Kenner-Muir notes, political cartoons occupy a privileged place in the editorial section of most daily newspapers, indicating that the media view them as important statements, worthy of public attention.

Religion is not a new topic for editorial cartoonists in the American press. In the early days of the art form, cartoonists commented on religious organizations and practices. The latter case is illustrated by the many cartoons critical of Mormonism that were published in 19th century periodicals. Cartoons presented a stereotyped image of the Mormon male as

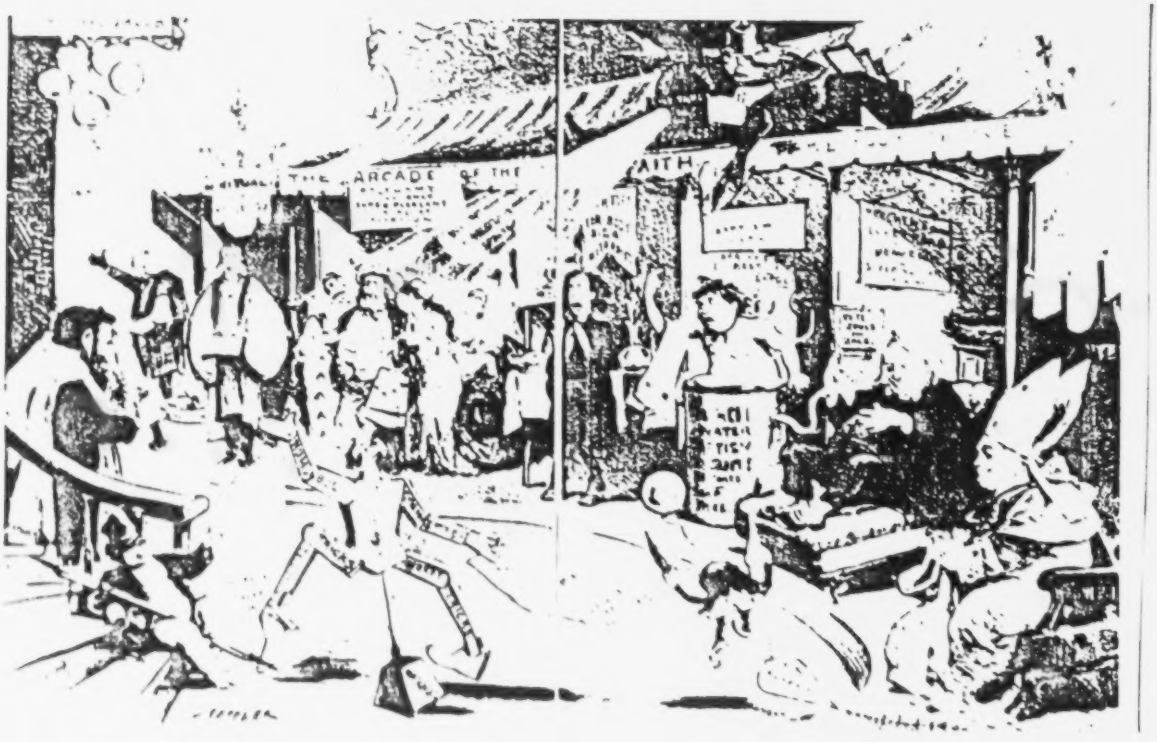


Fig. 1 A 19th Century View of Religion (Bunker and Bitton)

bearded and his wives as unattractive and argumentative (Bunker and Bitton). The practice of polygamy was satirized; this religious practice had set Mormons at odds with society and the law. Other 19th century cartoons satirized various religious denominations. A Keppler cartoon from an 1879 issue of Puck titled "Religious Vanity Fair" depicts religious groups and leaders as hawkers at an open-air market, selling their particular brand of salvation like so much patent medicine. (Figure 1)

As religion particiapates in the political arena, and as religious

groups attempt to insert sacred values in secular policy, religion becomes a worthy subject for study, as it is reflected in the media. In more recent years, cartoons have referred to Papal pronouncements on the role of women in the church, the excommunication of a feminist leader from the Mormon church, and the motives of televangelists. (Figure 2)

Fig. 2 A Cartoon From the Des Moines Register, June 3, 1987

The controversial nature of cartoons about religion also inspires attention. Among all topics which might be satirized by cartoonists, religion is commonly reported to evoke significant reader response, in particular, negative response. Hy Rosen, cartoonist for the Albany Times-Union , suggests that religious topics evoke such response because they are "emotional"

issues, a view echoed by Tony Auth of the Philadelphia Inquirer (Schmitt). Although the focus of this study is not on reader response to cartoons, the controversy that religious cartoons engenders affirms the importance of studying cartoonists as interpreters of events.

On the basis of negative audience response to the subject of religion in cartoons, one might expect that religious values, practices, or leaders are portrayed in a negative light. Alette Hill, commenting on visual allusions to the religious or spiritual side of Jimmy carter in cartoons, suggests that depictions of Carter as an angel, a faith healer, or a minister were trivializing and reflected "skepticism about the candidate's sincerety" (190). If negativism is pervasive in current cartoons about religion, does it take the form of skepticism about religion in general? Some negative portrayals were found by Hart, et al.,in their study of a news magazine. Religion in Time magazine was portayed as "more concerned with institutional matters than pastoral matters," and inter-denominational conflict was a pervasive theme in religious news reporting (255). Consistant with these findings was the conclusion that religious reporting was more a commentary on group members than on the spiritual values represented by their gods (255). One question my study asks is whether editorial cartoons frame religion in ways similar to news magazines, and whether the rhetorical frame reveals a judgement more on religious values (as in the 19th century examples previously cited) or religious organizations. Thus, the ultimate question of my study is directed at the implicit content of cartoons, the narrative themes developed.

But this study also must concern itself with the explicit content of

cartoons, for the visual depictions lead to an understanding of implicit rhetorical themes. Cartoonists typically use visual characterizations as a reference towards a broader assumption. The tools of the cartoonist are representation and metaphor. In cartoons about religion a cross, for example, might be used as a sign representing the existence of a religious entity, or a symbol, representing a religious ideal. Metaphors may occur in layers, with the sum of representations offering a significant construction of an image. Thus, when George Bush is depicted in a cartoon as wearing a skirt and lettered sweater and holding pom-poms, the objects serve as signifiers for "cheerleader." But the representation of cheerleader produces metaphorical transformations that comment on Bush's character. Cheerleaders are not active participants in events, but play out a passive supporting role. Furthermore, the reference here is to a female cheerleader-- the skirt-- which challenges Bush's masculinity and underscores, however uncomfortably, the notion of passive role-playing.

Another way cartoons possess layered meanings is through narrative association invoked by images. Although cartoon strips inherently possess a narrative quality because of their sequential format, editorial cartoons also have narrative qualities in that they are not limited to the depiction of a character or the display of objects, but they frequently make a metaphorical connection to a narrative. Editorial cartoonists usually position their subjects within a scene of events or within a larger metaphorical "scene." Often the characters in an editorial cartoon are enacting some event or situation that is part of a larger drama, or

cartoonists make allusions to familiar narratives such as fairy tales to create intended associations in the audience's mind. So we might say that cartoonists not only present depictions but they imply narratives in an effort to locate subjects in an understandable and rhetorical context. Most editorial cartoons must be interpreted at these two levels. First, the reader decodes the explicit visual representation, then the reader must interpret the implicit associations. This analysis of content is directed at determining how religion is depicted in cartoons and how it is defined, in an effort to understand how the processes are connected in meaning-function. First, how do we know "religion" is the referent in a cartoon? Second, what "stories" are told about religion as a result of this depiction, and how are they conveyed? If, indeed, today's cartoons portray religion in a negative light, where does that negativism reside? Is it in the visual presentation, in the story told, or are the two processes inexorably linked?

Data Base and Methodology

The unit of analysis for this study was the single editorial cartoon. The sample consisted of editorial cartoons published in United States newspapers over a thirteen-month period beginning September 1, 1986. An editorial cartoon, for the purpose of this study, was defined as a cartoon commentary appearing on the editorial pages of newspapers and/or grouped with written editorials.[2] Comic strips typically found on comic pages were excluded primarily because readers hold different expectations for comic strips than for editorial cartoons.

During the study period several news stories referring to religion

captured the country's attention. These stories included the PTL "scandal," Oral Robert's fundraising methods, the Pope's visit to America, the issue of secular humanism vs. traditional religion in the schools, and the participation of two ministers in the Presidential campaign. Since cartoons have currency and comment on timely matters, I assumed that time periods rich in religious-oriented news stories would also yield editorial cartoons which reflected religious issues.

A sample of 151 cartoons from 24 newspapers was chosen on the basis of diversity and availability. (Specific information on the sources for cartoons appears in Table 1.) Because of the unique creative viewpoints and styles expressed in editorial cartoons, it was assumed that diversity would be tantamount to representativeness. Newspapers were selected from various parts of the country and reflected a variety of editorial viewpoints among them. Newspapers with widespread regional circulation were included in the sample because they often present the work on an in-house cartoonist. Nationally syndicated cartoonists were also an important part of the sample. Some newspapers from smaller communities were included to ensure that prominant syndicated cartoonists' work would be represented, and that the study addressed the mass audience scale. In all, the work of sixty-two cartoonists[3] was studied for visual content, metaphors, and thematic narratives offered about religion. It is estimated that a total field of approximately 3,000 cartoons yielded the 151 which were classified as religious in topical orientation. In other words, five percent of the cartoons published in sampled newspapers were on the topic of religion. This ratio should not be construed as representative of

the incidence of religious topics in editorial cartoons, even for the study period, since certain time frames were targeted because a high yield of cartoons on religious topics was expected. In particular, the period from March to June, 1987, was targeted for some papers because the PTL scandal was highlighted in the news, generating a number of cartoons on the subject. However, when all issues of a newspaper for the 13 months were available, all were examined. Targeting only took place when there was limited availability of issues.

A coding scheme was constructed which consisted of three sections. The first section recorded details of date, source, artist, and general topic area of the cartoon. The second category catalogued visual signs and symbols or specific characterizations used in the cartoons to identify them as "religious" in subject matter. Some cartoons had more than one definitive symbol or sign that conveyed the topic. For a very few cartoons the subject matter was denoted, not through signs,characterizations, or other visual means, but through captions or other inferences. Because of the visual orientation of this study, these cartoons were not coded. (A list of definitive signs, symbols, enactments, and characterizations found in the sample appears in Table 2.) A third category identified narrative themes conveyed by the cartoons; principle themes were recorded as well as subordinate themes. Themes were found to operate at two levels: descriptions and assertions. The descriptive level simply described or reflected a situation, e.g. "the Pope visits America." The second level is more overtly rhetorical; a judgement or evaluation is imposed upon the subject and some assertion about the subject is proposed, e.g. "televangelists

are duplicitous." Perhaps the distinction is best seen in two themes that refer to Pat Robertson's Presidential bid. One merely describes: "Pat Robertson's campaign has religious overtones," while the other asserts and evaluates: "Pat Robertson's campaign is compromised by its religious overtones."

Table 1. Unit of Analysis and Newspaper Sample Yield

Source	Sample	Yield
Washington Post National Weekly Edition	all issues 9/86-9/87	13
Akron Beacon Journal	"	4
Sacramento Bee	"	29
New York Times	all issues 3/87-9/87	3
Washington Post	"	4
Boston Globe	"	5
Des Moines Register	"	23
Quad City Times (IA)	"	4
Portland Oregonian	" and 9/86	6
San Francisco Chronicle	all issues 3/87-6/87	5
San Francisco Examiner	"	9
San Jose Mercury News	"	7
Los Angeles Times	"	2
San Diego Union	"	3
Daily Hampshire Gazette (MA)	available issues 9/86-9/87	5
Hartford Courant	"	6
Vacaville Reporter (CA)	"	5
Fairfield Daily Republic (CA)	"	3
Philadelphia Inquirer	"	2
Boston Herald	"	2
Portland Press Herald (ME)	"	2
Sprinfield Republican (MA)	"	2
Valley Advocate (MA)	"	2
Miami Herald	"	5
	N= 151	

Table 2. Dominant Visual Characterizations, Symbols, and Enactments

Image	Incidence
I. CHARACTERIZATIONS	
A. Mytho-spiritual entities	
1. God	4
2. Jesus	5
3. the Devil	2
B. Human Biblical characters	
1. Mary and/or Joseph	4
2. Adam and Eve	1
C. Contemporary leaders (specific)	57
II. SYMBOLS	
A. Religious icons	
1. cross	9
2. Bible	6
B. Signs	
1. ecclestastical garments	3
2. angels	1
3. halos	5
4. stained glass	3
III. ENACTMENTS	
A. Biblical events	4
B. Religious paintings	9

Of seventeen themes identified, an overwhelming proportion were evaluative and assertive rather than merely descriptive. (The themes identified and the incidence of their occurrence is presented in table 3.) A single coder was used, with spot checks by other observers.

Findings

Those cartoons which employed some specific visualization to define and classify the subject as "religious" used three basic means of visual cues. By far, the majority of the visual cues were specific characterizations of persons, whether living or dead, human or spiritual in nature. Personalized characterizations were depicted of God, Jesus, the Devil, Christian leaders (the Pope and fundamentalist preachers), and Biblical characters (Mary, Joseph, and Adam and Eve). While God, Jesus, and the Devil are characters found in the Bible, they possess an extra-human quality that permeates contemporary religious idealizations. They are symbolic embodiments of Power, Good, and Evil more than they are persons or personalities, so a seperate category was called for. No non-Christian manifestations or personalities were found, although there were minor allusions to Judaism and Eastern-oriented spiritual cults in two cartoons. Of the characterizations depicted in the cartoons as defining visualizations 78% are of contemporary church leaders, suggesting that the target of the cartoonist's satire is directed at particular persons more than classes of believers. In other words, spiritual or holy persons such as Jesus and Mary are not the subjects of skepticism as are fallible human beings. This argument is further supported by examining those cartoons

which did not use a specific definitive visualization to convey their meaning, but rather presented a contextual understanding that identified the subject, or identified the subject primarily through captions or labels. Predominantly, these cartoons dealt with the subject of the secular humanism controversy and book-banning. Here, there were not well-defined characterizations of the groups being presented or satirized. Certainly, the cartoons look with some skepticism upon the activities of fundamentalists or satirize the image of the "secular humanist," --------- but because the fundamentalists are not specifically characterized in a high-identification manner, the imaging power is not as overt as when televangelists are depicted and characterized in specific ways.

Another type of visualization employed by cartoonists was symbols. All visual elements of a cartoon may be symbolic, but here, the reference is to symbolic objects, either religious icons (artifacts used in religious practice which may be considered holy) or objects associated with religious people, places, and allusions. This second category of objects consisted of religious garments, especially clerical collars; angels; and halos; as well as stained glass, which was used to denote a church interior (explicitly) and religious attitudes (implicitly). The use of religious icons as symbols outnumbered the use of non-holy objects, but the difference was not significant.

A third type of visualization cartoonists used was a specific reference to or reenactment of a Biblical scene or a religious painting based on a Biblical event. Enactments in the first category included the

expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, a metaphor for Jim and Tammy Bakker's forced departure from the PTL Club; soldiers rolling dice for Christ's robes, a metaphor for televangelists manipulating the image of Christ; and Romans sacrificing Christians to the lions, a metaphor for internal strife among televangelists. Two paintings were referred to as the dominant visual metaphor in these cartoons: da Vinci's Last Supper and Micealangelo's Creation. Enactments of the paintings outnumbered direct Biblical enactments more than two to one, providing an interesting circle of representational reference in the cartoons. Certainly, the familiarity of artistic images such as The Last Supper and The Creation would reinforce the visual recognition and understanding in a cartoon patterned after the painting. Other Biblical events were visually depicted or implied in many of the cartoons in this sample, but they were not the dominant means used by cartoonists to convey a visual understanding of that cartoon as religious in nature or subject matter.

Seventeen themes were identified as implicit narratives in the cartoon sample. The themes expressed in editorial cartoons about religion describe events, and frequently adavance assertions or judgements upon those events. Of seventeen themes identified and present in the cartoon as either dominant or subordinate explanations of events, four present a given event or situation without an overt value judgement. There may be rhetorical aspects to any artistic depiction of an event, but, in this case, the "descriptive" cartoons did not make distinct evaluative statements, overt or implied, about an event. Where themes make an assertion

make an assertion or judgement about the nature of a religious event, practice, belief, or personality, the assertion is clearly evident by the way the cartoonist visualizes the vent or depicts the persons involved. The reader is invited to see a given situation or person the way the cartoonist sees it, and to play out the metaphorical associations imaginatively. When Bill DeOre draws a building torn apart, its two sides hovering over a gaping chasm, the reader is invited to share DeOre's image and assertion that the Catholic church is divided, and that the Pope's visit--represented by a banner that connects the two halves-- attempts to be a uniting force in that division. (Figure 3) Herblock presents different evangelical organizations as dirtied robes with bent and jerry-rigged halos and shedding angel wings, inviting the reader's perception of those organizations and their televised products as a sullied image of Christianity. (Figure 4) The explanation for

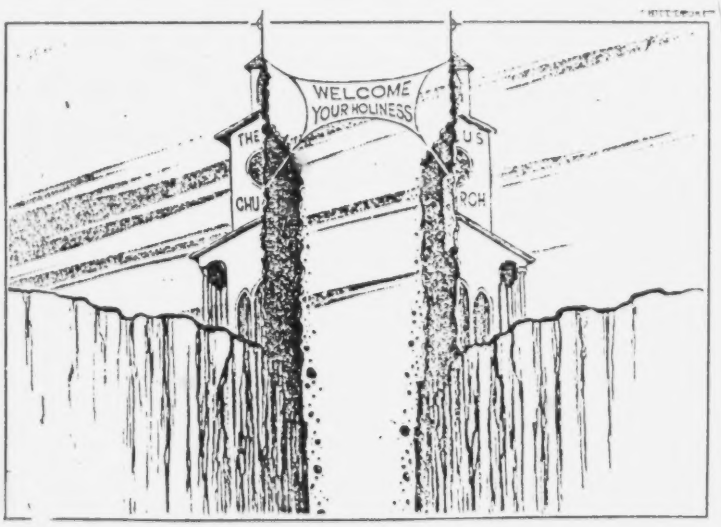


Fig. 3. Cartoon by DeOre in the Des Moines Register, 9-12-87

PULPIT OF THE GOLDEN MIKE
CHURCH OF THE HOLY BUCKS
MINISTRY OF THE NET PROPHET
MINISTRY OF CHARISMATIC CASH
THE LOVE-THY-DOUGH SHOW
CHURCH OF THE BROTHERLY TAKEOVER
CHURCH OF THE HEAVENLY ANTENNA
©1987 HERBLOCK

Fig. 4. Herblock cartoon in the Washing~ Post, 3-26-87.

'Choose your weapons, gentlemen.'

Fig. 5. Renault cartoon in the Sacramento Bee, 3-30-87.

events and the construction of personalities is a "natural" conclusion the reader reaches when presented with the rehtorical constructions of cartoonists. The cartoonist who portarys televangelists as dueling opponants, as Dennis Renault and others did (Figure 5), is fulfilling his suggested (by DeSousa) function as a "framer" of events. In this case, the leaders are depicted and characterized as combative and competitive people, relatively ununited in their quest for spiritual values. Similarly, when televangelists are depicted as hands reaching out from a television screen or holding a cross in a suggestive or threatening manner, as in Figure 2, an image is conveyed of television ministers as beggars or robbers. The implied conclusion is that televangelists are defined by their activities as solicitors of funds, more than as spiritual guides. They are more insistant upon taking than on giving. Cartoonists may not tell their audiences these things, but they show them.

In examining the sample of 151 cartoons, 141 were found to express at least one descriptive or evaluative theme.[3] Some cartoons had secondary themes, as well. In all, seventeen themes were identified as main themes functioning in one or more cartoons. Seven of these also appeared as secondary themes in some cartoons. The themes are defined as follows:

Descriptive Themes

1. The PTL Club is Troubled- These were statements of fact which depicted some aspect of the PTL ministry of Jim and Tammy Bakker as experiencing internal difficulty.

2. Pat Robertson's Campaign Has Religious Overtones- Typically, these cartoons depict some religious artifact or symbol in association with Robertson. No value judgement on his candidacy or his religious associations is offered.

3. U.S. Catholics are in opposition to the Pope- Catholic issues fly at cross-purposes, the Pope and church members disagree, or the Pope is playing a role of a parent admonishing errrant children. No judgement is offered on who is right or wrong.

4. Reproductive Technology is in Opposition to Catholic Teaching- Here, too, there is no evaluation or assignment of right or wrong. The cartoon reports a situation as seen by the church itself. Differs from #3 in that the opposition is not among church members, but among scientists.

Evaluative Themes (Assertions)

5. Money is More Important to Televangelists than Spiritual Values- Fundraising or the acquisition of material goods is depicted as the primary concern and activity of television ministries. Cartoons may comment on specific organizations, or on televangelists in general. These cartoons allude to the dichotomy between spiritual and material values, thereby evaluating the situation.

6. Religious Groups are at Odds With the Values of God/Jesus- Here, not only does division exist, it is clearly contrary to established spiritual values as represented by God or Jesus. These cartoons show God or Jesus exasperated or disapproving of religious groups or activities.

7. Pat Robertson's Campaign is Compromised by its Religious Overtones- Unlike cartoons in theme #2, a value judgement is implied. Here, Pat Robertson is depicted as a religious fanatic, is naive about his chances for election (which are nil), or his policies and ideas are viewed negatively insofar as they represent a narrow religious viewpoint. Robertson's campaign may be directly associated with negative religious events in the news, such as the downfall of Jim Bakker.
8. The Devil Made Them Do It- The PTL scandal is the work of the Devil.
9. Religion/Religious Groups are a Threat to Freedom of Thought- Threats to knowledge, free speech, and civil liberties in contemporary life are portrayed as a consequence of religious activism. Religious beliefs are equated with book-burning or the unavailability of books.
10. Religious Ideas are Integral to Knowledge- Learning or knowledge is incomplete or deficient without the injection of religious ideals. This could be seen as the opposite judgement of theme #9.
11. God/Jesus are in Collusion with Religious Events- Religious events in the news, whether good or bad, are carried out in the name of God (or Jesus), and tacit approval or complicity is implied. This is the opposite of theme #6.
12. Religious Leaders are Duplicitous- This theme differs from #5 in that either material values are not explicitly depicted or they are not explicitly contrasted with spiritual values. Primarily, this category offers constructions of televangelists and other religious leaders that contrast with their presumed roles as spiritual guides or counselors. Instead they are depicted as robbers, beggars, bill collectors, thiefs,

snake oil salesmen. This theme describes cartoons in which ministers are not simply obsessed with material wealth, but are characters other than what they appear to be on the surface.

13. Religious Practice is Tainted- Religion or religious groups might be good or might have been good at one time, but current events have sullied the image. Halos are bent, robes are dirtied. The true form has not changed, it has only been dirtied or broken. A complete transformation from good to evil does not take place.

14. The Character of Religious Leaders is Questionable- Theme # 12 referred to the roles of religious leaders. This theme finds specific people in religious events depicted in satiric ways, other than commentaries about their materialistic or duplicitous natures. They are trivialized and depicted as silly, insane, ridiculous, or preoccupied with sex.

15. Religious Figures are Engaged in (Un)Holy Wars- The "Holy Wars" designation is conveyed by religious leaders quarreling, fighting, or involved in disputes over territories, influence, congregations, or money. But the "wars" are distinctly unholy for they are not waged against evil, but engage covetous persons in trivial battles.

16. The Papal Edict in Natural Reproduction Is Inconsistant With Church Dogma; It is Hypocritical- Since Mary did not conceive Jesus through "natural" human reproduction, she is banished from the church or encounters Papal disapproval. The Pope or church fathers are depicted as hypocritical or foolish, while Mary is affirmed as blameless.

17. Religious Issues are Nothing Sacred- Current events connected with religion

Table 3. Distribution of Narrative Themes in Cartoon Sample

N=141

Themes	% of primary themes	% of primary and secondary themes
1. The PTL Club is troubled	1.4%	1.2%
2. Pat Robertson's campaign has religious overtones	2.8%	2.9%
3. U.S. Catholics are in opposition to the pope.	7.8%	6.4%
4. Reproductive technology is in opposition to Catholic teaching	3.5%	2.9%
5. Money is more important to religious leaders (televangelelists) than spiritual values	13.5%	18.0%
6. Religious groups are at odds with Jesus/God	9.2%	8.7%
7. Pat Robertson's campaign is compromised by religious values	4.2%	4.0%
8. The Devil made them do it	1.4%	1.2%
9. Religious groups threaten freedom of thought	7.0%	5.8%
10. Religious ideas are integral to knowledge	.7%	.6%
11. God/Jesus are in collusion with religious events	2.1%	1.7%
12. Religious leaders are duplicitous	6.3%	5.8%
13. Religious practice is tainted	3.5%	2.9%
14. The character of religious leaders is questionable	12.0%	13.9%

Themes	% of primary themes	% of primary and secondary themes
15. Religious figures are engaged in (un)holy wars	9.2%	10.5%
16. The Papal edict on Natural reproduction is inconsistant with church dogma; it is hypocritical	3.5%	2.9%
17. Religious issues are nothing sacred.	11.3%	10.5%.

are combined with secular events such as Gary Hart's Presidential bid, the Iran-Contra affair, or the Wall Street insider trading scandal in such a way as to associate or blend them. Religion is not regarded as a separate issue, but is part of the fabric of political and economic reality. Religion is secularized and, consequently, enjoys no special privileges in how it is viewed by the media.

These themes frame religion by offering narratives that describe the current state of affairs in the religious community or among church figureheads. The state of current events is defined through the cartoonist's depiction and, in many cases, through his (all cartoonists sampled were men) evaluation. Even without evaluative references, the cartoonist has argued for the significance of particular religious events by virtue of his attention to them. If cartoons possess immediacy and currency, any subject treated by editorial cartoons are viewed as significant when compared to all other possible subjects at any given time.

If there is one issue that permeates the themes in this cartoon sample, it is the issue of hypocrisy. There is the hypocrisy of duplicitous leaders (5.8% of the total themes and 6.3% of the dominant themes), the implied hypocrisy of religious leaders who possess questionable character (13.9% of the total themes), and, most of all, the hypocrisy that separates value and practice in the actions of ministers concerned with material wealth (18% of the total themes). In all, more than half of the sampled cartoons, or 58.1%, question the motives or character of religious leaders, particularly televangelists, and suggest the root issue is one of hypocrisy. This particular framing of religious issues is significant in light of the fact that television evangelism was just one of several religious issues expressed in cartoons over the sampling period. That cartoonists chose to comment extensively on issues relating to televangelists is in itself a type of framing activity.

Narratives that comment on tainted religious organizations and practices and the duplicity and questionable character of religious leaders share some common ground. In each of these themes is the implied argument that there exists some more perfect untainted and unquestionable ideal which reflects "true" religious value. In effect, many of the cartoon themes uphold religious ideals, because the current events in the news are held up in ironic contrast to those implied ideals. In Figure 6, for example, the scene is reminiscent of the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples as painted by Leonardo daVinci. But the insertion of contemporary participants doing battle over the table and the banner that reassigns the scene of events suggest that the values expressed by the biblical

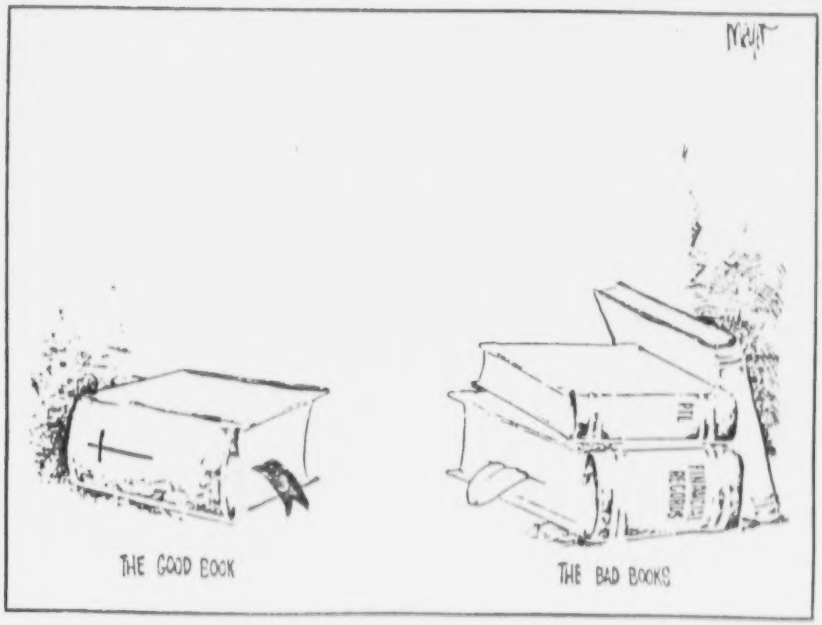
Last Supper have been subverted and replaced. It is not an attack on the original values.

Fig. 6. Cartoon by Conrad in the Sacramento Bee, 4-4-87.

In another cartoon by the same artist, Christ's sacrifice on the cross is contrasted with a preacher in a way that suggests sorrow and the subversion of religious values (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Conrad cartoon in the Des Moines Register, 5-10-87.

Figure 8. Meyer cartoon in the San Francisco Chronicle, 5-18-87.



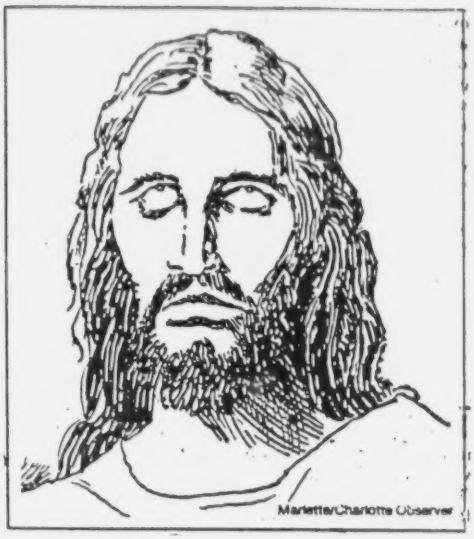


Fig. 9. Marlette cartoon in the Sacramento Bee, 4-4-87

Fig, 10. Conrad cartoon in the Sacramento Bee, 4-11-87.

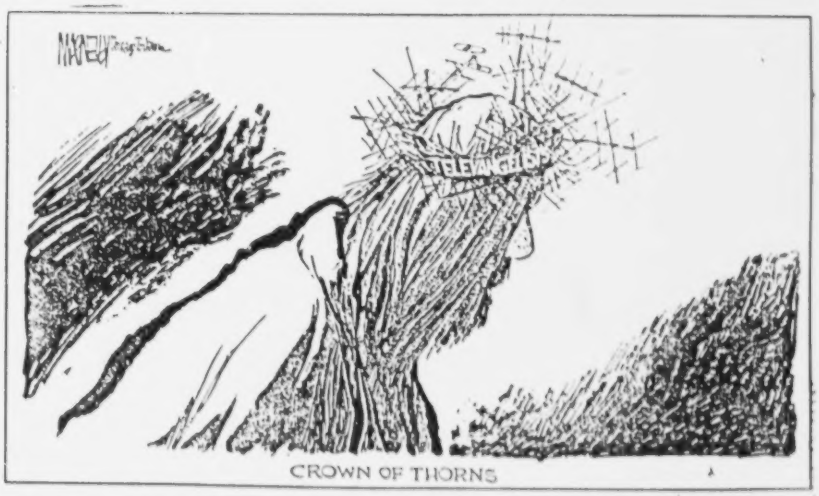


Fig. 11. MacNelly cartoon in the Daily Hampshire Gazette, 6-5-87.

San Francisco Chronicle cartoonist Meyer creates a clear distinction between ideals and practice in his cartoon (Fig. 8) on the financial aspects of the PTL scandal. The PTL Club is represented by its financial recirds as the "bad books" in contrast to the "Good Book." Cartoons such as these separate current events such as the PTL scandal from "true" religious values and practices by drawing distinctions between them in visual portrayals.

Not only is the audience to infer that the cartoonists' judgments are accurate, God and Jesus make these same judgments in theme number 6. God's negative response is more pervasive in the cartoon rhetoric than God's complicity; theme number 6 outnumbers theme number 3 by 500%. The ironic contrast between a tradition of religious values and current practice in the name of religion is reinforced. Figures 9 and 10 offer depictions of Jesus's exasperation and God's anger with current religious events, most particularly with the televangelist scams. The end result is that such hypocritical religious practices become a new "crown of thorns,"

or a denial and subversion of the positive aspects of Christianity. This idea is also conveyed in cartoons that reflect theme # 8, the current scandalous events in religion are the work of the Devil. The implied warrant is that these events cannot represent "true religion" or Christian ideals if they are the Devil's work.(Figure 5)

Not all of these themes affirm religion by highlighting hypocrisy, however. The hypocrisy evident in theme #5-- the opposition of spiritual and material values-- does not necessarily elevate spiritual values or make a value-laden distinction between the material and spiritual. The judgment assesses the situation but does not suggest or state what"ought"to be. In some cases, as with the cartoon in Figure 12, "Almighty God" is merely re-imaged for us by the cartoonist.[4]

Fig. 12 Cartoon by Wright in the San Francisco Examiner, 4-6-87.

Still, this reimaging of God might stand in ironic contrast to the reader's coception of God.

In focusing predominantly on contemporary personalities as the dominant characters in their cartoons, the artists avoid direct attacks on religious history or values. While this may be less a strategy than a response to news, it is a significant element of the rhetorical content of the cartoon sample. Human beings are imperfect compared to spiritual figures. The satirization is directed at human error, not spiritual error, by implication.

An informal review of letters to editors complaining about cartoons with religious overtones suggests that readers may be more disturbed about the use of religious icons in cartoons than other visual signs of religion. Religious icons such as the cross and the Bible are held sacred in a particular way, they are part of religious rituals and are customarily treated as sacred objects with special rules for use and display. These rules are violated by cartoonists who adopt the icons, putting Bibles in the hands of charlatans or associating crosses with guns, as was done in Figures 2 and 5. Here the cartoonists have depicted the sacred icons as participants in questionable or hypocritical events, not as something apart and distinct from them. Even when icons serve a positive role--by providing an ironic contrast with negative actions by humans, for example-- it's possible that a reader might still feel his or her expectations violated by seeing precious icons used for non-spiritual ends.

Conclusions

This study confirms some of the findings of Hart, et al., about mediated messages on the subject of religion. In these editorial cartoons, as in the news magazine, religion was pictured as a competitive arena with religious groups and leaders battling over "turf" or concentraing on fundraising and the acquisition of wealth at the expense of spiritual service. This was as true of the Catholic Church as of the "electronic" evangelical ministries: Catholicism was portrayed as a place of internal strife and division, not as a place of sovial action or spiritual healing. (It was a place of spiritual instruction on the issue of reproduction, however.) Here, we can be reminded of the popular complaint that the media only reports bad news, they don't report ongoing good work-- and the media's response that the latter isn't "news." [5]

Like the example of the news magazine, religious commentary in recent cartoons was directed at contemporary participants in religion rather than at their respective gods. However, Hart, et al., found that news magazine commentary was directed at groups, while the editorial cartoons tended to satirize group leaders apart from group members. The objects of ridicule were usually labeled with individual names, and when referred to collectively, it was by the label of profession (TV ministers) rather than by church. The problems with the PTL Club, for example, are clearly the fault of Jim and Tammy Bakker and their colleagues, not of an unquestioning and naive congregation. Far from being sheep, in fact, the flock tends to be fed up with the leaders.

Editorial cartoons in the study period presented images and narratives which portrayed religion as dominated by combative leaders obsessed with self-interest whose practices are diametrically opposed to the standards of modesty, stewardship, and emphasis on spiritual values that we normally assume leaders would hold.

One significant difference between the content of editorial cartoons and the news magazine in the earlier study was the foregrounding of different religious groups. Hart, et al., found that Jews were over-represented, but in the more recent editorial cartoons in this study, they were absent, except as a political entity. In the cartoon sample, "religion" was synonymous with "Christianity." Cartoonists may feel freer to comment on the prevailing "national" religion than on "minority" religions. To make too much of this difference would be misleading, for the timeliness of news reporting, whether in magazine reports or editorials, dictates the content. While it's true that the media decides what constitutes news, it is less clear that newsworthiness is a concept completely controlled by the media. For one thing, some Christian groups found themselves in the forefront of public attention during this time because they injected their issues into public discourse. Televangelists broadcast their activities over the public airwaves and the Pope provided more instruction on public legal and social issues. Furthermore, we are reminded that editorial cartoons do not report the news, but comment on it, and that comment is usually satirical. So, cartoonists are apt to be more selective of the news events they comment on. Events that inspire satirical treatment or that are seen by cartoonists

as a case of hypocrisy may be more likely to be reflected in cartoons. And cartoonists blame more often than they praise.

Perhaps the most interesting theme conveyed by editorial cartoons in the study was that religious issues are nothing sacred and that they have become a part of the fabric of political and economic affairs, not just the culture. This theme was the third most prevalent expressed in the cartoon sample, accounting for over 10% of all themes. The extent to which sacred and secular affairs are mixed in the public domain has important repercussions in a country that professes to separate the two, officially. When cartoonists mix religious and secular issues it is self-justifying, as well. Religious cartoons are less subject to criticism on the grounds of offense if the issues blend with politics. Certainly, as religious groups move their values actively into the public arena and attempt to influence public policy, they open themeselves to satirical review by cartoonists and to editorial comment on their activities.

In constructing a portrait of religion in contemporary America, cartoonists were guided by a vision of traditional religious values. These values were affirmed in the course of attacking leaders for their subversion of traditional values. This offers little support to a popular concept of the American press as populated by "secular humanists" who are anti-religious and lacking in moral values. Rather than iconoclasts, cartoonists seem to be "keepers of the flame," upholding traditional religious values and attacking hypocrisy. At the same time, cartoonists defend the constitutional foundations of the government by directing their attention

in large measure to the interplay between religion and politics. Here, the message is cautionary and anti-dogmatic. Religious values may be a good thing, but religious practice is suspect, especially as it occurs in the public arena. If the message from cartoonists that some religious events are objectionable because they vary from Christian moral teaching is troublesome to people, that may say more about the audience than about the cartoonists.

Notes

[1]One of these, Marion "Pat" Robertson, lists his profession as a broadcaster, although he is a well-known member of the lectronic ministry. During the course of this study, Robertson resigned from the ministry. Rev. Jesse Jackson is a minister by training and experience, although his official role over the years has been as organizer and social service director of an inner-city agency.

[2]During the period of this study the Des Moines Register periodically published an editorial cartoon on page one. Since these cartoons were drawn by the staff cartoonist and they obviously followed the format and intent of carttons positioned on the editorial pages, these page one cartoons were included in the sample.

[3]Ten cartoons were unclassified by theme. Three apparantly reflected local or state issues that were unfamiliar or made no comment on their religious subjects. The remaining seven were too ambiguous or obscure to be decipherable.

[4]This cartoon was also the most abstract example of several cartoons which reenacted Michaelangelo's Creation. God, or the God-figure, is represented by a dollar bill rather than as a humanoid character with a pointing finger. This image patterned after the famous painting continues to be a favorite visual metaphor for cartoonists.

[5]One notable religious news story missing from the cartoon sample is the controverial, possibly positive, sanctuary movement among American churches which shelter political refugees. This story did appear in other manifestations in the media during the study period.

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